Racialization of Dominican Youth in New York City
ニューヨーク市における若いドミニカ系の人種化

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Abstract: This paper examines racialization of Dominican youth in relation to their distinctive lifestyles vis-à-vis that of their parents. Dominicans have played a central role in latinizing and caribbeanizng New York City. With the constant migration since 1960s, they gainfully consolidated their "ethnic" community in upper Manhattan, Washington Heights. As the US-born population develops, community leaders set up cultural institutions, such as afterschool programs that educate youngsters, teenagers and college students who according to their parents are seemingly not fully acculturated in the "real" Dominican way of life. Such anxiety as well as obvious differences in their daily lives as demonstrated in their English proficiency, legal status, ethnic diversity promotes racializing of their children in search of self-fulfillment as well as self-identity. The close contact with African Americans and Puerto Ricans who share the same neighborhood, gets strengthened as they spend time together in school and after school. The coteries among them, especially of hip hop fans reward them for racialized identities. Whichever identity; black, Latino or Hispanic one picks up, it separates young Dominicans from their parents. The young might be proud of themselves as Dominican Americans. Such identities clearly recapitulate ethnic transformation that is characteristic of New York City.

Keywords: Racialization, Dominicans, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, New York City

要約:本文では、ニューヨーク市の若いドミニカ系が親世代とは異なる生活経験のなかで人種化していることを指摘するものである。ドミニカ系はニューヨーク市のカリブ化、ラティーノ化を担う中心的な存在である。1960 年代以降、大勢が本国ドミニカ共和国より移住しているが、今やマンハッタン区北部に彼らの確固たるエスニックコミュニティを形成している。米国生まれの世代が多くなったことから、コミュニティリーダーや親たちは「本物」のドミニカ文化を知らない若い世代を問題視するようになっている。英語習得率、法的立場、エスニック的に多様な人間関係などにより、若い世代の生活経験は親のそれとは非常に異なる。とくに、アフリカ系アメリカ人、プエルトリコ系との密な人間関係が学校現場やストリートなどで深まると、彼らはやがて「黒人」としての意識を共有するようになる。とくにヒップホップはそれを促す。エスニシティを超えた人びととの近い関係をきっかけに、「ドミニカ系」としてだけではなく、「黒人」「ラティーノ」「ヒスパニック」などの人種化されたアイデンティティがいくつも獲得されている。

キーワード: 人種化、ドミニカ系、アフリカ系アメリカ人、プエルトリコ系、ニューヨーク市

1. Introduction

The US Census Bureau count of New York City's population stood at 8,405,837 in July of 2013. Latinos constitute about one third of New York City's population today. Puerto Ricans have long been known as the major Latino group in New York City. It is no doubt that they were the largest until recently. But, Dominicans are now seen as the largest Latino group in New York City.

New York City has been their most popular destination. According to the American Community Survey PUMS 2013 Data, there were about 747,473 Dominicans in the city in 2013, compared to 719,444 Puerto Ricans[i]. The data suggests that the Dominican-origin population has surpassed Puerto Ricans. Now, Dominicans are officially the majority of all Latinos in New York City and yet the significant number of immigrants has not been counted. As for Manhattan, the biggest commercial center of New York City, Dominicans have clearly been the majority since 1990s as the result of the outflow of Puerto Ricans from their old neighborhoods.

Massive emigration from the Dominican Republic began in 1962 after the death of the dictator Rafael Trujillo who held power for more than thirty years. Under his regime, emigration was very limited to the elites and the families with strong connections to the government officials. The emigration peak lasted until late 1990s, yet the influx still continues today. The Dominican immigrant population in the United States grew from 12,000 in 1960 to 350,000 in 1990, then to 879,000 in 2010. More than 960,000 Dominicans from the Dominican Republic resided in the United States in 2012 (Migration Policy Institute 2014[ii]). Dominicans had the highest number of births in the city among Latino subgroups, according to New York City's Bureau of Vital Statistics. Over 33,000 children were born to Dominican mothers between 2010 and 2012. Although the data for the following year has not been released, it is assumed that about 11,000 more were born in 2013. High natural birth rate is significant of this group. Even if the immigration stopped now, the population would still keep increasing.

Washington Heights, one of the biggest enclaves of Dominicans in the USA locates in upper North of Manhattan. According to the Department of City Planning of New York,[iii] the poverty rate among Dominican ancestry is the highest in the city with 32.8% (2011).

In the community referred to as "Dominican Republic in New York," the business by

Dominican owners inclined to the Dominican clientele is booming and ranges from restaurants to fruits stands, shoe stores, *bodega*s or kiosks, taxi services, beauty salons, clothing stores, and pharmacies among others. The commercial areas are always occupied with shoppers, from young to old, but exclusively working class or lower middle class Latinos, the majority of them Dominicans. On weekends, the area becomes even busier with customers coming from outside of the neighborhood to shop for their daily supplies. Strangers to the neighborhood cannot realize the severe economic condition that Dominicans as a group face in the city.

This paper introduces racialization of Dominican youth in Washington Heights and the neighboring areas of New York City; Harlem, East Harlem, and South Bronx, living with Puerto Ricans and African Americans.

2. Dominican Americans and Race

In the Dominican Republic like many other parts of Latin America, "mixed race" is often seen as one "racial" category. The distinction between "mixed" and "black", for example, is so blurred. The color of eyes, the complexion of skin and the condition of hair, among others all together matter at judging someone's race, when the person appears not so "racially obvious" at first sight. This is contrasted to the US racial categorization which the one's skin color mostly matters in identifying the race of someone who is racially unrecognizable. One drop rule in the USA has still deeply ingrained in the secular society. So, if you don't look like "white," you would be "black" in the racially dichotomized society. It is observed at times that Dominicans express their confusion or feel uneasy to be seen as black in the USA when they identify themselves "racially mixed" or "white," or even "Latino" and/or "Hispanic" though both terms do not indicate any specific race. Obviously, being lighter-skinned is preferred and in fact, has more social advantages in the Dominican Republic and the USA.

Looking back at its history, the social and economic foundation of Spanish Santo Domingo and the Dominican Republic later was built upon the slavery system from the beginning.

Tens of thousands of Africans were brought to *Hispañola* as slaves. Since then, the number of the population of African ancestry has been growing. The black and *mulatto* rebellion against French authority in the late 18th century in French San-Domingue or later Haiti, followed by Haitian invasion and occupation of Santo

Domingo from 1822 to 1844, and the constant flow of Haitian workers to the Dominican Republic until today, can also validate the large population of African ancestry. As a result, the African-rooted cultural influence is essential to Dominican culture: belief system, religion, food, folklore, music, and dance. Yet, many Dominicans have overlooked the significances of the cultural heritage or element in the whole culture. To understand such an attitude, we must pay attention to the unique history of the country.

Negrophobia among Dominicans is deeply imbued in the history of the Dominican Republic. It was brought up with the arrival of the early European settlers followed by Christopher Columbus. Since then, it was kept throughout the slavery and the post-slavery onward period. However, it clearly became a national agenda under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. His animosity toward blacks was so intense. The media under his control fed the whole country with anti-black ideology. All the prints including textbooks in school education, the contents of radio broadcasting, speech, music, and dance as well as the official announcement proclaimed that the national culture was closely related to European culture. Then, the government considered that Dominicans were of European ancestry. All the cultural influences that appeared to be African in them were seen as “bad influences” brought into the nation by Haitians. Haiti is officially the first black republic in the world, which makes all Haitians conventionally blacks, at least in those days. The Dominican Republic constructed the notion of Dominicanness that is very Eurocentric in contrast to Haiti, based on the fear of sharing the island with the country for the black.

Intensified negrophobia led the notorious massacre in 1937 which killed more than 35,000 Haitians in the Dominican Republic. All the musical instruments and dance styles seemingly “African” were prohibited to be performed in public. Even merengue music and dance, one of the most popular entertainments among Dominicans went through transformations. At the musical performance, African-rooted drums had been replaced to European instruments such as saxophones, strings, and accordions. The music became a nationalistic item to be controlled by Trujillo to meet his agenda which promotes his Eurocentrism. The thrusting movements of the lower body in merengue dance as well, met with governmental aversion. Eventually the “quieter” version of merengue music and dance in favor of European court-style became prevalent under the Trujillo regime. Trujillo was desperate to purge African heritage of any kind from the country. After his assassination, one of his attendants Joaquín Balaguer took the office for seven presidential terms, nearly 24 years until 1996. His publication in 1980s

unquestionably predicated the inferiority of blacks and propagated his people to strengthen Spanish background of Dominicans (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998:143[iv]). Yet Dominicans are influenced by this negrophobic ideology.

The World Factbook on the CIA homepage shows racial composition of the Dominican Republic as mixed 73%, white 16%, and black 11%. According to the one drop rule of the secular American life, approximately ninety percent of the people fall in the racial category of blacks. The majority of the population takes up the lower classes of the society. Itzigsohn who has conducted researches on the Dominican American identity shows the data as below.

Responses	How do you define yourself racially? (Open-ended Q)%	Are you: white, black, or other? (If other, specify) (Closed-ended Q)%	How do you think most Americans classify you racially? %
Black	6.6	16.8	36.9
White	3.8	11.6	6.4
Hispano or Hispana (Hispanic)	27.5	21.1	30.4
Latino or Latina	4.1	2.8	3.2
Indio or India	13.1	18.8	4.0
Dominicano or Dominicana	12.8	2.0	0.2

Table 1 Dominican Immigrants' Answers Three Racial Self-Identification Questions based on a survey of Dominican immigrants in New York and Providence, Rhode Island (N=418) Source: Itzigsohn(2004[v])

Table 1 suggests one drop rule applied on the informants. Also, we can understand that the category "Hispanic" is racialized, as Hispanic, as well as Latino is not originally a racial term. This implicates that Dominicans refrain from identifying themselves as blacks.

Respond (Parent/ Child)	Self-Reported Race						
	White %	Black %	Asian %	Multiracial %	Hispanic, Latino %	Nationality as Race %	Other %
Parent	30.6	11.1	0.0	44.4	0.0	5.6	8.3
Child	13.9	2.8	0.0	13.9	55.6	8.3	5.6

Table 2 Self-Reported "Race" of Children of Dominican Immigrants and Their Parents[vi]
Source: Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS); Portes and Rumbaut (2001); Rumbaut (2005).

Understanding Dominican racial composition in the USA might differ from the one in their native land, as can be seen on the CIA data, Table 2 elucidates that more parents identify themselves as white while their children do not. The percentage of children identifying as white is much smaller. But, many more children see themselves as "Hispanic or Latino." Table 2 also shows children racialize the category of "Hispanic or Latino." The difference implicates different social environments and experiences of each generation.

3. Racial identity in negotiation among Dominican youth in New York City

The number of second and third generation of Dominicans, born in the USA, is now increasing. Their fluency of English language and enculturation in the US society as well as legal status in some cases, differentiate their living experiences from the ones of their parents. Younger ones come to close contact with other ethnic peoples sharing social spaces, schools, residential areas, community activities and work. This is contrasted to the situation of their parents. They tend to stay in the same groups who share the same ethnic identity. Often, due to the lack of time to spend and enjoy themselves in the neighborhood, they have fewer opportunities to meet new peoples with different ethnic or racial backgrounds. They tend to be busy working all day and commute long distance. Then, there would not be much space left for doing something new. Making friends or acquaintances with different ethnic backgrounds extends social spaces even more, which is the situation available for the younger generation. People come to realize their own ethnicity especially when they meet "different" peoples and then naturally gain new identities. In case of Dominican youth in Washington Heights and the neighboring areas where their schools, community centers, and shopping areas are located, Dominicans meet African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos. Even though both parents are Dominican immigrants with few years of residence in New York City, their children become close friends with non-Dominicans, spending lots of time together at school and in the street as they start going to school. Older students, over 12 years old, might have trouble with schoolmates, possibly due to confrontations of any kind along ethnic lines. Conducting researches in the neighborhoods, there have been some incidents of that sort. Yet, frequent school and community events help promote understanding cultural differences above all. According to my research finding, their inclination to hip hop, reggae and reggaeton in the street and afterschool programs bind them all together as

young blacks (Miyoshi 2006, 2013[vii]). Dominican NGOs set up cultural events and afterschool programs effectively utilizing such popular culture to have control over the young in the neighborhood. Newly acquired racial identity as blacks among Dominican young generation as they grow up extending friendship beyond their ethnicity has offered them new perspectives. Eventually they come to feel even more proud being Dominicans or Hispanics or Latinos as such indicators cater for their uniqueness that are valued in the young people's private arena. This finding contrasts to Table 2 which many children identity themselves as Hispanics or Latinos. One possible reason for this can be the characteristics of New York City where people of multicultural backgrounds reside so clammed that they routinize and negotiate their cultural differences. New York City promotes multicultural education that goes beyond school education. Also, it can be the history of Washington Heights and the neighboring areas with most original areas of hip hop culture. Hip hop is seen as a cultural form tied to the locality of "blacks.[viii]" Deepened knowledge of hip hop culture and its history through friendship delivers one racial identity.

Enjoying their time with people of multiethnic backgrounds, the young become aware of the acquired racial identity as black, in case of the identity such as Hispanic or Latino, likely promoted by popular music and dances; Latin hip hop, merengue, bachata, salsa, and reggaeton that glue Spanish-speaking people together. Here again, identity labels "Hispanic" and "Latino" become racial.

> *"Race, for instance, plays a complicated and contradictory role in the formation of Latino identity in the United States. For Hispanics, to be defined as a minority in the United States is to be placed in a position analogous to that of African Americans. The state sees Hispanics as parallel to (and measures them against) American blacks.[ix]"* 119:1998

4. Conclusion

Music and dance are salient to Dominicans. As a matter of fact, there is a famous expression "if you do not dance, you are not Dominican." Dancing is deeply related to their national identity. Cultural events in the neighborhood throw traditional music, specifically *merengue*, *bachata*, or *dem bow* or Dominican reggaeton rhythm. Lots of Dominicans in New York City see themselves as lovers of music and dance. People of all ages enjoy music and dance of many kinds.

Unlike traditional merengue and bachata music, hip hop and reggaeton often reflect the life experiences in the inner-city especially those of the young. Also, they are the music and dance that most young residents in the neighborhood are inclined to. When hip hop lyrics talk about police brutality and tough street life that people undergo, people strongly proclaim racial identity.

The inclination toward racial identity among young Dominicans reflects specific life style shared among them and the characteristics of the residential area. Exposed in multicultural settings and popular culture with the people of multicultural backgrounds, acquisition of multiple identities, especially racial ones work as a vehicle to smartly drive through different social spheres; Dominican, Hispanic, Latino, black, even Afro-Dominican or Afro-Latino, for example. As the northern part of Manhattan becomes even more Dominican, while decreasing the number of Puerto Ricans from the neighborhoods, new kinds of racial categories might be on call.

Notes

[i] "Have Dominicans Surpassed Puerto Ricans to become New York City's Largest Latino Nationality? :An Analysis of Latino Population Data from the 2013 American Community Survey for New York City and the Metropolitan Area" Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies, Graduate Center, City University of New York. Latino Data Project - Report 61 – November 2014. The undocumented number is not included.

[ii] Retrieved December 29, 2014. Migration Policy Institute HP (http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/foreign-born-dominican-republic-united-states)

[iii] *The Newest New Yorkers, 2013 Edition*. The New York City Department of City Planning.

[iv] Torres-Saillant Silvio and Hernández Ramona, *The Dominican Americans*. 1998. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

[v] This table has been modified by the author. José Itzigsohn, "Dominicans in Providence: Transnationalism in a Secondary City," pp. 74-95. Sagás, Ernesto, and Sintia E. Molina (eds.), *Transnational Perspectives on Dominican Migration*. 2004. Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida.

[vi] This table has been modified by the author. Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. 2001. Berkeley and New York: University of California Press.

Rumbaut, Ruén G. "Sites of Belonging: Acculturation, Discrimination, and Ethnic Identity Among Children of Immigrants," pp. 111-163. Thomas S. Weisner(ed.), *Discovering Successful Pathways in Children's Development: New Methods in the Study of Childhood and Family Life*. 2005. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[vii] 三吉美加(Miyoshi Mika) 「*身体をめぐるアイデンティティの構築：ニューヨークにおけるドミニカ系 2 世のダンス実践から(Constructing Identity though Bodily Movements: Dance Practice among Dominican Youth in New York City*)」2006. Ph.D Dissertation. University of Tokyo: Japan.

三吉美加(Miyoshi Mika) 「*ヒップホップとレゲトンにみる黒人性とラティーノ性 (Blackness and Latinidad in Hip Hop and Reggaeton: In Case of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New*

York City Barrio)」 *Rikkyo American Studies* 35(2013): pp. 97-114.

[viii] This is a common perception. The Caribbeans and some Jews were also central figures in the early period of the mid-1970s and 1980s.

[ix] Jones-Correa Michael. *Between Two Nations: The Political Predicament of Latinos in New York City.* 1998. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

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